

What was Robertson thinking...or was he?

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

San José, Costa Rica—Pat Robertson's image was all over local television news in Latin America this morning.

The Virginia-based TV evangelist was shown telling his "700 Club" audience that controversial Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez ought to be assassinated because he is making Venezuela "a launching pad for communist infiltration and Muslim extremism."

"I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it," Robertson said. "It's a whole lot cheaper than starting a war ... and I don't think any oil shipments will stop."

Urging the U.S. government to kill Chavez, Robertson continued, "We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability. We don't need another \$200 billion war to get rid of one, you know, strong-arm dictator. It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with."

So much for the respect for life and pro-life positions that Robertson has long espoused. How inconsistent to fight to protect the life of unborn babies and then call for the assassination of a foreign leader who holds opposing political views.

Not that Robertson or anybody else shouldn't defend the right to live. Robertson should be commended for his strong support of right-to-life issues. But it is difficult for any thinking person not to see the dichotomy between his two positions.

Not that Chavez is a model leader or one that many would like to see continue in office. His fiery revolutionary brand of government has caused concern among political and Christian leaders throughout the Western Hemisphere as he has spread instability throughout the region, initiated an arms buildup with neighboring countries, allegedly aided Colombian guerrillas and anti-government forces other neighboring countries such as Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru and driven much foreign investment from his country.

But to call for his assassination? What was Robertson thinking, or was he? Chavez may be unstable and erratic, but he is no Hitler. The German church debated long and hard before some Christians such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer began a movement to assassinate Hitler. But that movement was in desperate times, and came from within Hitler's own country.

These may be difficult times in Venezuela, but they are not desperate as were those dark days of World War II in Europe. And Robertson is not a Venezuelan. He is a U.S. citizen with a powerful television outreach calling for the assassination of a foreign leader from the comfort of his plush office in Virginia.

There is another aspect to Robertson's misguided statement. That is the impact on his own evangelical brothers and sisters in Venezuela and throughout Latin America of his

careless words, and the difficulty that he may cause many evangelical missionaries in Venezuela.

There is already enough tension between Roman Catholic and Protestant (Evangelical) leaders in Latin America. In some parts of the continent, particularly the Andean region of South America and isolated parts of Mexico, violence still erupts against evangelical churches, pastors and congregations.

There is also a concern for Protestant Christian workers in the region. “We could see a backlash in Venezuela against U.S. missionaries,” one missionary with a number of years experience in Venezuela expressed following the news of Robertson’s statement.

Uninformed non-evangelicals and skeptical non-believers often see prominent spokespersons such as Robertson as broadly representative of evangelicalism and the evangelical church that has moved into their formerly all-Catholic neighborhood.

In fact, for most evangelical Latin Americans, Robertson is not their spokesman, nor do his sometimes radical, insensitive positions represent those of local churches, pastors or leaders.

Latin American churches are raising up their own pastors and leaders who strongly speak prophetic words about politics and social conditions in their countries. They address concerns from their own experience and knowledge of their culture with biblical understanding and the support of their own church members.

They don’t need a foreign TV evangelist calling for the assassination of their own leaders.

How embarrassing!

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